

preservation issues

NEWS FOR THE PRESERVATION COMMUNITY

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

★ Vol. 2, No. 1 ★

“... we came to the corner of Eighteenth Street and Wham! Everything along that street was all lit up like klieg lights

And everywhere you went, there was at least a piano player and somebody singing, if not a combo or maybe a jam session . . . we were walking into a scene where the action was greater than anything I've ever heard of.” ca 1924-25, William Basie, from *Good Morning Blues, the Autobiography of Count Basie*.

The “scene” stretched from Troost Avenue east along 18th Street past Vine – its heart lay at the corner of 18th and Vine Streets, memorialized in the lyrics of a song by jazz great Joe Turner. The nightly performance of live jazz, dance halls and night clubs, located along both 18th and 12th Streets, established Kansas City’s reputation as a music mecca during the 1920s and 1930s.

Urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s destroyed the clubs along 12th Street. Neglect, disinvestment, conversion to industrial use and numerous other alterations contributed to the loss of a number of buildings associated with the city’s jazz music history along 18th Street. Despite these losses, the historical significance of the 18th and Vine area as the only relatively intact, physical remnant of Kansas City’s

jazz heritage was officially recognized in September via listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register designation will be celebrated during February, which is Black Heritage Month.

Scholars continue to debate the exact origins of jazz, which evolved in New Orleans at the turn of the century and then spread north throughout the Midwest. Its roots are based in the blues and ragtime. Kansas City had its own distinctive style, often produced by large bands of ten to 15 musicians. Bands such as Bennie Moten’s Kansas City Orchestra, Walter Page’s Blue Devils, and T. Holden’s Twelve Clouds of Joy performed constantly at local dance halls and clubs and toured throughout the Midwest.

In the 1930s, Kansas City possessed 120 night clubs and 40 dance halls; most fea-

tured jazz performances. Jazz venues in the 18th and Vine Historic District included the Eblon Theater, Subway Club, El Capitan Club, Sunset Club, and Lincoln Theater. The area also offered support services for musicians through Mutual Musicians Local #627, housed in a building at 1823 Highland Avenue which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1982.

The 18th and Vine Historic District is also significant as an historic black neighborhood and a center of black commercial activities. A number of black-owned businesses and the offices of prominent black professionals were located within the district’s boundaries. These include the first black-owned automobile dealership in the United States (the Roberts Building, 1826-1830 Vine Street, b. 1923); a building and loan association formed by a group of black

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The 18th and Vine National Register Historic District in Kansas City consists of a group of buildings associated with Kansas City’s jazz history.



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January/February 1992

Statewide
Survey
Program

Although the future of the 18th and Vine Historic District is optimistic (see cover story), the fate of other black history sites in the state is not as bright. Indeed, the history and significance of many of these sites is only recognized by a handful of local citizens.

The birthplace of Coleman Hawkins, famed black jazz saxophonist, was demolished in St. Joseph with little fanfare. No property associated with Hiram Young, a black wagon maker whose wagons were considered a "must" for travel on the Santa Fe Trail, remains in Independence. The significance of a stable associated with Tom Bass, the internationally known black saddle horse trainer from Mexico, Missouri who is credited with creating Kansas City's American Royal Horse Show in 1907, is not widely recognized.

Only three percent of Missouri National Register listings (28) represent black history. Eighteen of these 28 listings are located in one of three cities (Columbia, Kansas City, and St. Louis), yet a number of Missouri's communities at one time possessed a significant black population. Interestingly, 17 of Missouri's 28 black history listings are either churches or schools, properties that are usually easily identifiable as community landmarks.

One of the greatest difficulties to overcome in drawing attention to the need to preserve black history sites is the lack of historical documentation on the existence of many of these sites. As a result, many sites sit forgotten and overlooked, easily susceptible to destruction.

The Historic Preservation Program funded a statewide survey of black history sites in 1980 and currently possesses information on some 353 individual properties in the state associated with black history, in addition to the 699 buildings located in the Santa Fe Place Historic District, a black neighborhood in Kansas City (listed on National Register, 1986). However, very few of these properties are documented to the level that a National Register nomination could be prepared for them; many others go unidentified. Recognizing the need to draw

attention to our state's black history sites, the Historic Preservation Program prioritized the funding of projects related to black history in our two most recent grant cycles. (See funding story on page 4.)

— *Beverly Fleming*

Historic
Preservation
Revolving
Fund

The Historic Preservation Revolving Fund works to protect endangered historic properties statewide. The fund has aided properties threatened by commercial and residential development, severe neglect, potential demolition, long-term vacancy, and sale for inappropriate use. Through intervention by the Revolving Fund, these properties are now protected by covenants placed in the property's deed, assuring preservation into the future.

Not all properties are so lucky. Sometimes, when we are finally notified by local preservationists that there is a serious threat, it is too late for the Fund to intervene. Once developers have made a serious

(BLACK HISTORY, from Page 1)

investors to serve black residents (the Security Loan and Investment Association, 1816 Vine Street, b. 1922); the home of the Kansas City Call, a black-owned newspaper founded in 1919 (1715-1723 E. 18th); the offices of the Kansas City Monarchs, a baseball team in the Negro National League; and Dickerson Cleaners, the first dry cleaning establishment owned by a black businessman in Missouri (1814 Vine, b. 1922, severely altered).

Sitting just outside the district's boundaries, Attucks School (1815 Woodland Avenue) and the Paseo YMCA (1824 The Paseo) were also individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the 18th and Vine nomination project. The Paseo YMCA, constructed in 1914, was the primary social agency and center serving black citizens in the early 20th century. Attucks School (b. 1905) is the oldest continually occupied school built for Kansas City's black students. Unfortunately, Attucks School is on a list of 19 schools slated by the Kansas City School District

offer, for example, it is difficult to convince property owners to consider an offer from the Fund, even for the same amount. Or, once a property has been condemned due to severe neglect, pressure from local officials may demand demolition before an agreement can be reached.

A property may be owned by someone who is elderly and who has no heirs interested in its future preservation. A property that is vacant, or that is about to become vacant, may be a target for demolition or inappropriate alteration. Neglected properties may or may not be vacant.

The "silent killer" in many areas is inflation of property values. If a property is to be inherited, or has been owned by one family for a very long time, it may stand on land that may be worth many times its original cost. That makes sale to a developer a tempting way to take advantage of this potential gain. Farm land is often more valuable than an old, vacant house standing on it; this has caused the demise of many historic rural properties.

We are often asked by the legislature and many other officials to describe the need for preservation funding. With your help, we can begin to compile a list of these properties. To notify us of an endangered property, please call Jane Beetem, Revolving Fund Coordinator, at (314) 751-5373.

— *Jane Beetem*

for demolition sometime in the future.

National Register designation for the 18th and Vine area was pursued by the City of Kansas City and the Black Economic Union of Greater Kansas City in order to facilitate the revitalization of the area, which rapidly deteriorated in the 1960s, and to ensure the preservation of a part of Kansas City's black heritage. The Black Economic Union (BEU) is a private, not-for-profit, economic development corporation. The BEU possesses Missouri Chapter 353 redevelopment rights for the 18th and Vine Historic District and additional property to the south and east of the district.

Redevelopment proposals include the establishment of a Negro League Baseball Museum and an International Jazz Hall of Fame in the area, the conversion of the historic Gem Theater (1615-1617 E. 18th Street) to a community arts center, the construction of new housing on vacant land, the renovation of existing historic buildings using the federal historic tax credit, and the installation of streetscape amenities. — *Beverly Fleming*

Archaeology Profiles

An area in the vicinity of Babler State Park in St. Louis County has provided a particularly rich resource base for the study of Missouri plantation life and slavery. During the middle 19th century, three plantations (owned by Henry Tyler, Robert G. Coleman, and William H. Coleman) were in operation. Bringing with them more than 100 slaves, these interrelated planters came to Missouri in 1837 from Tidewater and Piedmont, Virginia. Each purchased relatively large tracts of land and specialized in hemp production for off-plantation sale.

Historical maps illustrate the presence of one, possibly two, slave cemeteries as

well as an African Baptist church and school. Buried beside the African Baptist Church are three veterans of the 68th United States Colored Infantry, a regiment which distinguished itself in combat at Tupelo, Mississippi, in 1864. One of these veterans, Elijah Madison, had previously been a slave on the Robert G. Coleman plantation.

Five farmsteads belonging to "freedmen" who remained in the area after the Civil War were also noted. These include the residences of John Anderson, George and Carrie Brown, David Green, Harrison and Lucy Green, and Louis Rollins.

Exploratory excavations have been conducted at the site of the Tyler residence. There, portions of two foundations, the base of a chimney, and a cistern have been defined. Associated artifacts mainly consist of construction debris. However, ceramic and bottle fragments, marbles, buttons, and portions of household implements have also been recovered. The

collection dates to the mid-to-late 19th century.

Testing to judge the integrity of David Green's residence has also been completed. A small pit, containing a pontil-base bottle and an oval-shaped post mold, were discovered. Unfortunately, a later structure, represented by a poured-concrete foundation, has destroyed portions of Green's cabin.

Archival research indicates that David Green was born in Virginia around 1835. He was brought to the St. Louis area by either the Tyler or Coleman family. By the 1870 census, he was listed as a farm laborer. His ownership of the small tract was tenuous. The Pitzman 1878 atlas lists Green as the owner of this property, but the 1880 census indicates that he did not own any land and worked as a sharecropper on a plot consisting of 20 tilled acres and 20 acres of woods. This difference could have been an oversight on the part of the census taker. The 1880 census further suggests that Green ran a diversified farm raising corn, wheat, chickens, pigs, and dairy cattle.

Plantation life and slavery have interested historians for decades. Following the lead of these scholars, archaeologists have begun to investigate plantation sites and have attempted to address slavery from an archaeological perspective. Yet the vast majority of these archaeological and historical studies have focused on the American South. Investigations in more marginal areas such as Missouri are lacking. Some differences in the social, economic, and political relations between planter and slaves should be expected based on the distance between Missouri and other slaveholding states. These potential differences make the recording, excavation, and analysis of the remaining deposits extremely important to our understanding of this era in Missouri history. —Patti Wright, Joseph Harl, and Dennis Naglich, Research Analysts, University of Missouri-St. Louis Archaeological Survey

MISSOURI Historic Architecture

Shotgun Houses ca 1880-1930

Characteristics:

- one story;
- rectangular, one room wide, three or four rooms deep, one behind the other;
- usually clad with clapboard or occasionally brick;
- roof is most often gable with gable end facing street;
- windows typically one-over-one double-hung sash;
- porch and architectural trim vary with period of construction.

PHOTO GARY KREMER



Ida Bell Burns Lindsay was born in this shotgun house at 515 South 16th Street in St. Joseph. Dr. Lindsay was the first black American to receive a doctorate in Social Work. She later became a Dean at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where she founded the School of Social Work.

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Special Round Grants Awarded

Seven National Register of Historic Places nominations were funded under a recent, special round of fiscal year 1991 Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) grants limited to nomination projects.

Four of the seven (highlighted below) were for properties associated with black history. The round of funding was particularly unique in that normal matching requirements were waived.

The projects are:

- * Jefferson City Community Center
- Charles Smith Scott Memorial Observatory (Park College, Parkville)
- Urial Griffith Rural Historic District (vicinity of Eolia)
- * Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge #2 (St. Louis)
- * Anna Bell Chapel (New Haven)
- * Washington Chapel CME Church (Parkville)
- Leight's Mercantile Store (House Springs).

For more information about Historic Preservation Fund grants, contact Jerald Stepenoff (314) 751-5376.

preservation **issues**

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Historic Preservation Program
P.O. Box 176
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dates to Remember

Route 66 Association Annual Meeting and election of officers January 11 at the Red Cedar Inn, Pacific. For more information call Jim Powell (314) 539-5500.

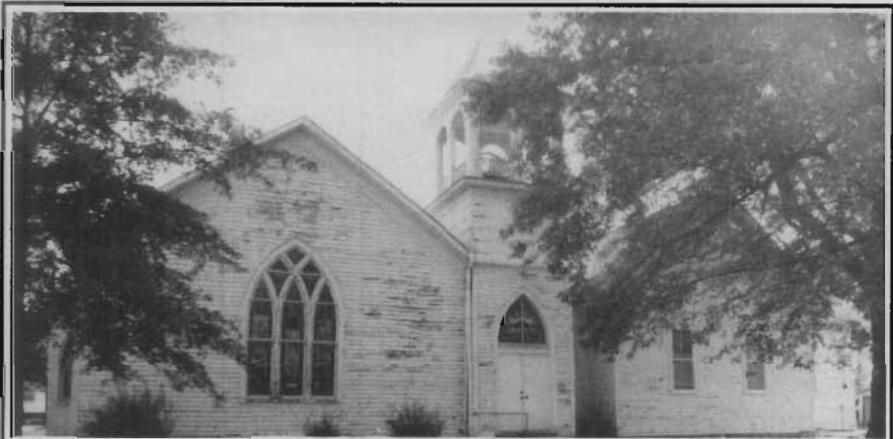
February is Black Heritage Month! Check media for local events statewide.

March is Women's History Month! Plan now for local events.

Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Meeting March 9. For more information call (314) 751-5365.

Missouri Historic Houses: The Way We Lived April 4-5 in Springfield. Watch for brochure in March.

Historic Missouri Church For Sale



The Wheeling Methodist Church, owned by the Revolving Fund, is for sale for \$8,000. Beautifully colored stained glass windows, bell tower, large meeting room with half bath, and well equipped kitchen make this an attractive property. Preservation covenants will protect the building's integrity into the future. Alternative uses are encouraged. Meeting space, housing, or commercial use are possible. For more information contact Jane Beetem, (314) 751-5373.

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